6: Lane T-3 (no date) 1923 EGl Albania EGl

followed made the dangers of the night vocal for us. We had seen the dogs, tied by the houses, curled into sullen gray-white balls; they are wolves, they are the first dogs, torn from the forests and made half-tame savage companions of these primitive men. Here in the Albanian mountains the long process of molding life, by which men have created the breeds of dogs we know, the great Dane, the collie, the monstrous, fantastic bulldog, and the wispy Pekingese is still in its beginning.

For us, safe in the shelter of solid walls, the night wore away as the previous one had done. Talk and music and the desperate struggle with weariness; the leisurely dinner in the small hours of the morning; the brief lapse into unconsciousness, lying on the floor, which we shared with twenty others—our host and his wife and their smallest child, the last quite naked, had ascended the notched log to the nest of woven willow branches that hung above us on the wall—and the awakening at dawn to the smell of new-made coffee.

"Perolli," said Frances, desperately, "I simply can't walk another twenty miles on one little cup of coffee. Isn't there something left over from dinner? Can't I have just one little bite of corn bread? Oh, Perolli, please!"

"If we stay for that, it means we'll never start," said I. "Slowly, slowly, little by little, breakfast will be ready at six this afternoon."

"But I'm starving!" she wailed.

CHAPTER XIV

A NIGHT BY THE BYRAKTOR'S FIRE—THE BYRAKTOR CALLS A COUNCIL—REXH TO THE RESCUE —THE BYRAKTOR'S GENDARME TEARS A PONCHO —MOONLIGHT ON THE SCUTARI PLAIN.

THEN his grandmother made three beds, on three sides of the fire. She brought a two-inch-thick mat of woven straw and laid it on the floor; over it she spread a handsome blanket of goats' hair dyed in stripes of magenta and purple; under one end of the mat she put a triangular piece of wood to serve as pillow, and when I lay down she tucked other blankets over me. Rexh and the Shala man had the other mats, and all the byraktor's family went to their own places, leaving the big room and the dying fire to us three guests.

At four in the morning the house was astir. Out of the darkness yawning men came to stir the slumbering fire; the byraktor appeared without his turban, a weird figure with his shaven, skin-white head and long black scalplock, and began to make the morning coffee; the sheep and goats were driven out into the rain by the ragged shepherdesses. I sat up and put on my opangi, and the sleepy Rexh, still streaked with red dye from his fez, rolled out of his blankets.

7: Amery G-5 (1943-44) 1948 EG1 Albania EG1

513 When all had done[1] mattresses and eiderdowns would be brought and spread out on the floor for the half-dozen guests of honour, while the others made themselves as comfortable as they might with their overcoats and jackets. It was still considered rather indecent to undress, but before the lights were snuffed out the prudent ones would gather their arms and effects about them against the dangers and confusions of a night attack. In cold weather the fire was kept alight till morning; in summer the room would often become intolerably stuffy from the accumulated animal warmth of a score of snoring sleepers.

512 The Albanians were not given to early rising, for their evening hours were late, and in the mountains the mornings were cold. They would get up between eight and nine o'clock and, by a generous convention, the younger guests were left sleeping till last. The mountaineers knew not breakfast; but 264 315 301 in many houses the host would bring a cup of coffee or of hot, sweetened milk when he saw us wake. Ablutions were perfunctory, each man, or the host, pouring cold water from a ewer over his fellow's hands, with which the latter seldom did more than dab his eyes. Moustaches were *de rigueur*, though by exception Abas Kupi was clean-shaven; but only priests or bandits grew beards. Shaving, however, was most often a weekly affair and considered a sufficient occasion to warrant the valedictory greeting of "*Meschnett*" — an equivalent of 000 "God bless you" — to the shaver. In these matters I conformed to the customs of the country, but Maclean and Smiley insisted on adhering to the standards of cleanliness of their distinguished cavalry regiments. Stripped to the waist and with razors flashing, they washed daily and thoroughly, to the great wonder of the mountaineers who crowded round to 514 watch. Albanian sanitary arrangements were primitive but ingenious. The closet, which adjoined the guest room, projected, sometimes precariously, from the house over the courtyard below. It consisted of a hole in the floor, often of impracticably narrow circumference; and, underneath it, the thrifty Albanians were wont to keep their poultry, which gobbled up a strange diet with evident relish.

[1] [i.e. eating — Analyst]

10:Hasluck F-5 (1926-1939)1954 EGI Albania EGI

and moil the whole blessed day', she ended, sadly rather than bitterly.

Toil and moil she did. The daily duties of every peasant woman in her position included fetching firewood from the forest and water from the river or spring, besides cooking, washing and baking for the household. At certain seasons she must also do farm work, so long as she retained a measure of youth. Her husband did heavy work like ploughing, scything hay, or cutting oak leaves for winter fodder. But she must carry the manure from the stable to the fields in spring, help her husband to sow and earth up the maize and, while he stayed indoors, reap it. She must carry home the hay and fodder and feed them to the animals. If grain was trodden out by horses or oxen, her husband drove them; if threshed with flails, she wielded them. If there was no miller, she conveyed the grist to the mill, ground it, and brought back the flour. Only if there were a miller did these tasks devolve on her husband, and then it was only in order to keep her virtue above suspicion. In poor families she was herself the beast of burden, and when young was expected to carry up to seventy pounds. In richer families she had a horse or donkey to do the actual carrying, unless her home was under snow in winter. Then she must brave the snow that confined the animal to its stable and bring in supplies of firewood and water, fodder and flour. Paucity of workers prevented her husband from having more than a couple of milch-goats or ewes, and these were tethered; it was she who tethered, watered and milked them. It was she, too, who turned their milk into curds (*kos*) or butter and cheese, arduous tasks in summer when milk sours easily. She also saw to the poultry and in her spare time knitted or span.

Fortunately for the women, there was almost no peasant household in which a young husband and wife were the only workers. The eldest child, boy or girl, began at seven or eight years of age to herd the goats as they roamed in search of food and saw to them morning and evening. This gave the mother some relief and provided the family with more food and, by the sale of the goats themselves or the kids, more money. When very small, the girl must spin or knit as she herded; when in her teens, she must sew her trousseau; but no extra tasks were expected of boy herds. Since, too, a man's mother and sisters never lost their legal right to share his home, a family might include the husband's mother and even

10: Hasluck F-5 (1926-1939)1954 EG1 Albania EG1

his unmarried sister or his widowed, childless sister. In that event, while the younger women worked outside, his mother, if physically fit, remained at home to cook, sweep and bake, besides attending to the dairy and poultry. She also saw that any children who were big enough to walk but too small to follow their mother to the fields, did not fall into the fire or otherwise come to grief. She further entertained any men visitors who might come when her son was absent. She did not, however, wash her clothes or her husband's, should he be still alive, for even at the height of the busy season outside that was one of her daughter-in-law's duties. When she was no longer strong enough for her various tasks, she was sent out, complete with distaff, to herd the goats or plough-oxen and another woman succeeded her as housekeeper.

If the married pair had a separate bedroom, it was private property, as inviolable as a separate house would be, and no one other than the man and his wife and children might enter uninvited. Unless she was his wife, even the housekeeper was under the ban. It followed that when a wife worked outside, she must care herself for her bedroom, sweeping it, spreading the bedding at night, and picking this up again in the morning. She must also tend her children, and wash and mend their clothes, her husband's and her own, besides those of her mother-in-law. If she had a tiny baby, she carried it in its cradle on her back to the fields, left it in a shady place while she worked, and carried it home again in the evening.

If the house was too small to have a sitting-room, the husband ate in the kitchen. He never lingered over the meal, and in most districts ate alone unless his mother, privileged by having brought him into the world, wished to join him. A man who ate with his wife or sat much in her company courted public ridicule as unmanly and 'no class'. If there was a sitting-room, the husband probably took his midday meal in the kitchen and his evening meal in the sitting-room. Before supper he might invite his sons or even his daughters, if these were small, to share the comfort of the sitting-room for a little.

Peasant households with only one man in them were rare, since for economic reasons it was customary for several brothers or even several first cousins to live together until their children were of an age to marry. Then sheer pressure of population compelled the household to split up into smaller units, each with a house of its own.[1]

[1] See Chapter VI.

10:Hasluck F-5 (1926-1939)1954 EGl Albania EGl

592 When the men in a household were numerous, three or more might be shepherds, one tending the sheep, another the goats, and a third the oxen; several might be farmers who ploughed and hoed and irrigated; yet others might be housemen, one keeping the house supplied with firewood, a second going to the bazaar, and a third grinding grain at the local mill for the household's bread. Each thus contributed his quota to the family wealth, and obviously the more numerous the quotas, the greater the general comfort. A well-to-do household which had only a few men might make up the number of hands available by engaging servants. 'Çota's tableful' is now proverbial in Çermenikë because eighteen men—ten relatives and eight hirelings—used to sit down nightly to supper in Sali Çota's house in the village of Fenars in that district. If, however, a household were poor as well as small, it could not risk having to pay servants in a bad year, and must restrict its activities—for example, by keeping only sheep or goats but not both. Since sheep eat grass and goats leaves, they must have separate herds.

462 512 Even in the richest of these multiple households the women lived much as they did in small, poor ones. A housekeeper, who was generally elderly, cooked and baked for the whole family, swept the kitchen, the men's sitting-room, and her own bedroom if she had one apart from the kitchen, but did not enter any room belonging to a married man, even if he was her son. The young wives worked out of doors when required and at all times looked after their children, husband and bedroom. They were often exempt from fetching firewood and water and were reasonably fed and dressed, but otherwise fared no better than their poorer sisters. By and large, even in these relatively more leisured homes, women worked much harder than men. The latter excused their comparative idleness by saying that in Turkish times, when blood feuds raged, it had been death for most men to show their faces outside in the daytime, and if the family was not to die of starvation the women had to work for its bread. They claimed that when blood feuds grew rarer, they became more industrious. But they could never produce any evidence that the women had gained by their new diligence.

264 562 Soon after sunset the men sat down to sup at the same table in the sitting-room, while the women and children ate at another table in the kitchen. The food was brought to the sitting-room by